

## The President's Radio Address *May 1, 1999*

Good morning. Today I want to talk to you about one of the most important steps we can take to clean the air we breathe and protect the health of all Americans.

Over the past generation, our Nation has made enormous progress in improving the quality of our air. In the late 1960's carbon monoxide, lead, and smog levels were so high in several major cities that walking to school in the morning could be almost as harmful for young children as smoking cigarettes.

Today, people are breathing easier all across our country. Thanks to engineering breakthroughs and bipartisan environmental stewardship over the past three decades, we have reduced the annual emissions of harmful pollutants by a remarkable 70 million tons.

Over the past 6 years alone, even as our Nation has produced the most dynamic economy in a generation, we have improved air quality in every single State. We've reduced toxic air pollution from chemical plants by 90 percent. We've set the toughest standards in decades for smog and soot, which will prevent millions of cases of childhood asthma. Just last week the Vice President announced a new effort to clear the haze and restore pristine skies to our national parks. But we must do more.

Americans love to drive, and we're driving more than ever. But the emissions from our cars, particularly from the larger, less efficient vehicles, threaten to erode many of the air quality gains America has achieved. As a result, many of our States and cities are no longer on course to meet our vital air quality goals.

So last year EPA Administrator Carol Browner sat down with members of the oil and auto industries, environmental and public health groups, and State and local governments to study how we can stay on track. The level of cooperation was unprecedented, and so was the result.

Today I am proud to announce the details of this EPA proposal. The proposal would achieve a dramatic reduction in air pollution for the 21st century, and it would do so in the most cost effective and flexible ways. For the first time, we would require all passenger vehicles, including the popular sport utility vehi-

cles, to meet the same tough pollution standards. And for the first time, our plan addresses not only the cars we drive but also the fuel they use. Because sulfur clogs and impairs anti-pollution devices, we're proposing to cut the sulfur content of gasoline by about 90 percent over the next 5 years.

Beginning in the year 2004, manufacturers would start producing vehicles that are 75 to 95 percent cleaner than those rolling off the assembly lines today. And the health benefits would be enormous. Every year we can prevent thousands of premature deaths, tens of thousands of cases of respiratory illness, and hundreds of thousands of lost work days. According to some estimates, the benefits of the proposal may outweigh the costs by as much as 4 to 1.

In designing this proposal, we've taken great pains to make sure these new standards will not cause hardship for industry or reduce consumer choice. In many cases, existing technology will allow manufacturers to meet the new standards and still offer the same models popular with consumers today. To accommodate manufacturers of sport utility vehicles and others who face special challenges, our proposal provides extra time to meet the new standards.

We will spend the next several months getting comments and suggestions on the plan. Now that the EPA has published its proposal, a 60-day period of public comment and public hearings will begin. With the help of interested citizens, industry, and public health and other groups, we believe we can finalize this proposal by the end of the year.

Ever since the days when thick smog was choking our major cities, pessimists have claimed that protecting the environment and strengthening the economy were incompatible goals. But today, our economy is the strongest in a generation, and our environment is the cleanest in a generation. Whether the issue was deadly pesticides, fouled rivers, or polluted air, the American people have always proved the pessimists wrong.

With the EPA's new clean air proposal, we will prove them wrong once again. Not only will we enhance our long-term prosperity, we

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will ensure that our children inherit a living, breathing Earth, our most important obligation of all.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 5:49 p.m. on April 30 in the Oval Office at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on May 1. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on April 30 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast.

## Remarks at the White House Correspondents' Association Dinner May 1, 1999

Thank you very much, Stewart, Susan, Brian. You all were pretty tough on the Times for boycotting this dinner tonight. I understand they wanted to protest the increasingly circus-like atmosphere. Why are they doing it? I'm the guy who shows up every year and gets shot out of the cannon. [Laughter]

You really made me feel like I'm on the downhill slide—Brian spent all this time dumping on the Vice President. [Laughter] You know, you were really rough on him. That riff was pretty funny. I mean, you gave him credit for everything. I think since you pointed out that he went to the Kentucky Derby today, I should say, he claims no credit for siring the winner. [Laughter]

I know that this dinner has gotten out of hand in recent years, but I see a lot of familiar faces out here. And I want you to know that I really appreciate all these Hollywood celebrities inviting the work-a-day Washington press to join them tonight. [Laughter]

Now, you know I, on occasion, have my differences with the New York Times. But they've taken a principled stand. [Laughter] And I support them. In fact, I feel so strongly about it that I challenge the Washington Times and the Weekly Standard to follow their example next year—[laughter]—and the year after that, and so on. [Laughter]

I know there was some talk about my not coming this year, and I admit, the thought did cross my mind. [Laughter] But then I heard if I didn't attend, Aretha might not attend, and that would break Brian's heart, because we couldn't bear the thought of having Scott Pelley sing "R-E-S-P-E-C-T." [Laughter]

I hope you'll all enjoy Aretha, but you know—and I love her, and I will certainly enjoy it. And I want to see you later—I like to come

here because there are those other parties later on. Now, last year Sid Blumenthal swore he could get me into the Vanity Fair party. [Laughter] What a difference a year makes. [Laughter] This year I have to take him. [Laughter]

I love seeing all the White House correspondents in this room tonight. For me, it's a rare treat to see you outside the White House gates—and notwithstanding what Susan said, get used to it. [Laughter] You know that the National Park Service is planning this long-range plan to relocate the White House Briefing Room to a larger facility, outside the West Wing—which I think is too bad. I mean, Helen was just starting to get comfortable. [Laughter] And she's still mad about the last time the White House Briefing Room was moved—that's when the Capital moved to Washington from Philadelphia. [Laughter]

But look, this is going to be hard on us, too. It's going to be really hard on the White House if they move the Briefing Room because then the leakers will have to start dialing 10-10-321. [Laughter]

Speaking of big moves, I saw yet another journalist commenting today that if Hillary runs for the Senate, she'll have to deal with the New York press, and that will be hard, because they're even meaner than you are. I want you to know something: We are not scared of them; we're scared of the co-op boards. [Laughter] Have you ever seen one of those applications? I've been filling one out—look, here's my answer to some of the questions. You tell me what kind of chance we've got.

Question 2, anticipated employment? Unknown. [Laughter] Question 3, anticipated earnings? Unknown. [Laughter] Question 5, current residence? Public housing. [Laughter] It gets better. References? Nelson Mandela, the Dalai